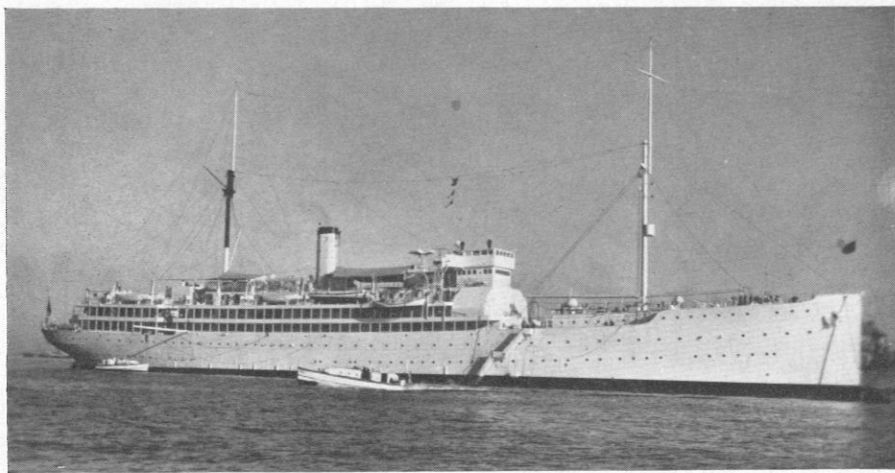


The Story of Our HOSPITAL SHIPS



U.S.S. "Relief," fleet hospital ship of the U.S. Navy

By Captain LUCIUS W. JOHNSON, M.C., U. S. N.

LIKE the Red Cross, the modern hospital ship traces its origin back to the Crimean War. It was the work of Florence Nightingale in that War—1854-56—that first inspired Henri Dunant with the idea of neutralizing the wounded in war, brought to fruition at Geneva in the Red Cross Treaty of 1864. It was also Florence Nightingale who, by her story of the horrors of the military hospitals in the Crimea, aroused British ire to such a point as to reform the whole matter of caring for the sick and wounded in war, which in turn resulted in the adoption of hospital ships for army use.

Of course, this was not the earliest use in history of ships for hospital purposes. We find references to such vessels among the fleets of ancient Greece and Rome. Spain's Invincible Armada in 1588, the French fleet of Admiral Tourville in 1690, and the British fleet during our Revolutionary War had them. But they were very crude.

The earliest episode involving a Red Cross hospital ship probably occurred in the war of 1879-81 between Peru and Bolivia on the one side and Chile on the other. The Chileans had blockaded the Peruvian ports, including Callao, within which lay a hospital ship equipped by the Red Cross Society of Lima. This ship was filled with wounded, whom the Society desired to remove to the hospitals of another city. Through the good offices of the Brazilian minister, the Chilean commander permitted the hospital ship of the enemy country to sail, giving it a safe conduct through the blockades of both ports.

During the Spanish-American War of 1898, Red Cross hospital ships were used on both sides. Admiral Cervera—his fleet bottled up in Santiago harbor

by our Navy and surrounded on land by our Army and the Insurrectos—found his supplies of food and necessities diminishing so rapidly that he was forced to decide on whether to surrender or to go out and do battle. The world knows that his choice was that of a brave man. Before making his sortie he selected the old steamer *Méjico* as a hospital ship, and the local Spanish Red Cross aided in preparing the vessel for patients. She was a small steamer which had traded among the Caribbean islands for many years. It was after the blockade had been

established that she slipped quietly into the harbor one night without knowing that a blockade existed or being seen by any of our watching ships. Sick and wounded Spaniards were put on board her before the combatant ships went out to meet the enemy. Those men who escaped to the shore from the sinking Spanish vessels and made their way back to Santiago were also taken care of on the *Méjico*, which continued to function as a hospital ship until the city surrendered to our forces.

On the American side in 1898, our Red Cross recruited doctors and nurses and gave money and supplies for the seven hospital ships which were employed by our Army and Navy. The Red Cross ship *State of Texas* was the first vessel to enter the harbor of Santiago after the mines were removed. Clara Barton, president of the American Society of the Red Cross—as then named—was on board. She had sent a note to Admiral Sampson, asking that food and supplies for the hungry inhabitants might be allowed to go in with the forces, which was arranged. The *State of Texas* and its tender, called the *Red Cross*, appear to have been used principally for providing supplies and comforts for the sick.

A call from the Army for doctors and nurses to care for the soldiers wounded in the fighting about Santiago was answered by the Red Cross, which quickly assembled 5 physicians, 29 nurses and two orderlies who sailed from New York on the Army transport *Lampasas* for Santiago on July 1, and reached Cuba after the surrender. But a yellow-fever quarantine had been established and none was allowed to land, so the vessel proceeded to Puerto Rico, where she became a hospital ship. There her Red Cross personnel cared for soldier patients, most of them down with typhoid.

One of the early attempts to take advantage of



In the surgical ward of a Navy hospital ship

the immunities conferred by the Red Cross flag occurred on the afternoon of July 26th, while the Cuban port of Nuevitas was being blockaded. A large sea-going tug towing a barge was seen coming out of the port, flying Spanish colors, the Red Cross flag and a quarantine flag. When brought to by the Americans, the Spaniards said they were hospital ships loaded with yellow-fever patients destined for Havana. Examination showed that there were very few sick among the 300 soldiers on board, and none had yellow fever, so all were made prisoners.

In the same year of 1898, the Austrian Red Cross Society procured from the Austrian Lloyd Steamship Company the steamer *Tritone*, and fitted her up to serve as a hospital ship for the fleet in the Adriatic Sea. The ship, which had accommodations for about 70 sick, was kept very busy.

Disturbances in China culminated in the Boxer uprising with attacks on the foreign legations at Peking in June, 1900. An international force was organized, composed of Russian, British, French, German, Austrian, Italian, Japanese and American troops. After two months of fighting they reached Peking and raised the siege. Sanitary provisions for this force included thirteen hospital ships of various nations, at least three of which were provided by Red Cross societies. These were the French *Notre-Dame de Salut*, the German *Savoia*, and the Russian *Czarika*. The *Notre-Dame de Salut* was a liner of 3,000 tons. After carrying troops and munitions to China she was taken over by the French Red Cross and converted into a hospital ship. She acted as an evacuation hospital with the forces in China and later went to Nagasaki to receive the French soldiers who had been cared for in Japanese hospitals. The *Savoia*, a freighter taken over by the German Red Cross and converted for use as a hospital ship, carried the wounded of the German forces to Nagasaki for hospitalization. The *Czarika*, formerly a cargo ship, was taken over by the Russian Red Cross.

For England's South African war of 1899-1902, a large number of hospital ships was provided, in which more than 70,000 of the sick and wounded men were

brought back home. One of these ships, the *Princess of Wales*, with capacity of 150 beds, was equipped and maintained by the British Red Cross.

The Russian-Japanese war of 1904-05, which followed, saw a great advance in the standards of hospital ships. For the first time, they became complete, modern floating hospitals. The two Japanese vessels, the *Saikio-Maru* and *Kobe-Maru*, were staffed and commanded by Red Cross doctors.

Russia had two hospital ships provided by the Government and three by the Russian Red Cross. The *Mongolia* was a 5,000-ton passenger ship, built in Austria. She was in Port Arthur when the siege began and remained there until the surrender. Three times during bombardments she was struck by shells, but only one man was injured. Her hospital equipment and staff were provided by the Russian Red Cross Society, being sent overland from Moscow. The *Nostroma* was a 7,000-ton vessel transformed into a hospital ship with a capacity of 700 patients. The *Orel* was a ship of 8,000 tons, fitted out and maintained by the women of France and Russia through their Red Cross Societies. The *Orel* was leading the fleet when Admiral Rojestvensky approached the Strait of Tsushima on May 27, 1905, at the end of his 17-month cruise from Libau, and she was the first ship to be sighted by a Japanese scout cruiser. That day the Russian fleet was destroyed and the *Orel* was captured. Because she had been used as a scout, she was condemned by the prize court and became Japanese property.

Italy's Tripolitan campaign of 1911-12 saw several hospital ships employed. One of them, the *Memfi*, was equipped and staffed by the Italian Red Cross. In addition to her regular staff of doctors and nurses, she had on board 17 ladies of noble families under the direction of the Duchess of Aosta, who acted as nurses.

War in the Balkans in 1912 provided employment for floating hospitals. The symbol of the cross is little honored in Mohammedan countries, so their society, which functions under the International Red Cross, is called the Red Crescent. This society acquired an English steamer, the S.S. *Rolland*, of 3,000 tons, and fitted her out for hospital duties under the command of Dr. Magoud Sabitt, professor of the medical school in Cairo. After the allied Greeks, Serbs and Bulgars took Salonika, they gave permission to the Red Crescent to remove the Turkish sick and wounded from Salonika to Smyrna on their hospital ship, transporting about 30,000 disabled soldiers and refugees. It was a 5-day trip, 2,000 refugees and 500 soldiers being carried each time. Conditions on board were described as most distressing, owing to the limited facilities and dark, poorly ventilated wards. People down with smallpox, dysentery, typhoid, rheumatism and pneumonia, including cases of child-birth, were indiscriminately mixed in with wounded soldiers. Yet this ship was credited with saving thousands of lives.

The World War saw more than 200 vessels used

as hospital ships. For the equipment and supplies of these ships the Red Cross societies donated large sums of money and made countless surgical dressings and articles of clothing for the sick. Through these organizations many doctors, nurses, orderlies and other helpers were recruited for the hospital ships. The advantage of Red Cross personnel was that such persons were accepted as complying with the neutrality requirements of the Hague Convention.

In the United States, two passenger liners of about 10,000 tons were taken over as hospital ships for the Navy, and re-christened U.S.S. *Mercy* and U.S.S. *Comfort*. Their elaborate equipment was provided by the Red Cross and the Colonial Dames. Throughout the war and for years after it these vessels performed valuable service with the fleet. The owner of a yacht called the *Surf* turned her over to the Red Cross to be used as an ambulance ship for Navy service. After the necessary alterations, she acted as an ambulance for the ships in New England waters, carrying their patients to the shore hospitals.

The French hospital ship *Charles-Roux* was provided and equipped by the French Red Cross. She performed excellent service, especially during the Gallipoli campaign, when she acted as an ambulance ship, carrying sick and wounded from the beaches to hospitals at Mudros and Malta. Another outstanding service of the French Red Cross on the water was the floating ambulance service which was maintained on the canals and rivers of Belgium and France. The network of waterways allowed the small boats to come within two or three miles of the frontline trenches, so that wounded men could be very quickly brought to them and any necessary dressings or operations done with the very least loss of time. The Red Cross developed a special barge which was a small ward and operating room, towed by a motor boat which provided electricity for the barge. Patients were brought by small boats with outboard motors, or even canoes which, hidden by the banks of the canal, could penetrate almost to the front trenches.

In most naval battles the greatest loss of life is due to drowning. Back in 1866, 600 casualties from this cause at the battle of Lissa drew the attention of the world to the fact that very little had been done to reduce such needless losses of life. So the suggestion has been made that rescue ships be provided by the Red Cross to follow the fleets and provide impartial succor for the wounded and shipwrecked.

But there are difficulties in the employment of such Red Cross ships. One of the first is that no commander-in-chief of a belligerent fleet would allow in his neighborhood a hospital ship whose movements he could not control and in whose personnel he did not have complete confidence. It is not likely that he would provide the master of such a vessel with the information necessary to enable it to be in the vicinity of the battle at the opportune time. But more difficult problems than these have been solved by conference; and some day we may see the proposal working.